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DOCUMENTATION FORM

Species?Thayer's Gull

How Many?1 ad. and 2 1st-winter

Location?Rathbun Reservoir, Appanoose Co. (Island View East and West Areas)

Habitat?sitting on ice and feeding on open water with other gulls

Date?20 Dec 1986

Time?10:05-10:30 A.M. and 1:30-1:54 P.M.

Observers Name and address:Steve Dinsmore, Ames

Others who saw bird:Ray Cummins

Description of bird:Both of the first-winter birds were seen in the morning near the dam. Both birds were slightly smaller than nearby Herring Gulls and had smaller, rounder heads than Herring Gulls. Both birds were mostly chocolate brown colored, had slender, dark bills, and had pink legs (these marks indicate they were first-year birds). The eyes appeared dark. The head, mantle, and underparts were a uniform chocolate brown color on both birds. In flight, the upperwing was chocolate brown becoming darker towards the wingtips (there was no light "window" on the inner primaries like a Herring Gull shows). The underwing, seen in flight, was a uniform silvery-white color with no dark color in the primaries or near the tips of the feathers. In flight, the tail was brown with a darker terminal band.

The adult bird was only seen in the afternoon at the Island View East Rec. Area. I first noticed the bird because of the largely white wingtips and smaller size as compared to Herring Gulls. While perched, the bird was slightly smaller than Herring Gulls in direct comparison. The legs were a brighter pink color than a Herring Gull's legs. The head was white with some brown streaking on the sides and a dark smudge around the eye. The head also was smaller and more rounded than a Herring Gull. The bill was yellow with a red spot near the tip and was shorter and slimmer than a Herring Gull's bill. The underparts and tail were white. The mantle was light gray and about the same color as the mantle of a Herring Gull.

Similar species and how eliminated:The first-year birds were separated from first-year Iceland Gull by the distinct tail band and the darker primaries and from first-year Herring Gull by head shape, bill size, more uniform body color, and the silvery-white underwing. The adult bird was separated from an adult Iceland Gull by size, bill shape, and more black (still not too much, though) in the wingtips and from an adult Herring Gull by head shape, bill size, and paler wingtips.

Viewing conditions and equipment:Viewing conditions were excellent with a mostly clear sky and the sun behind me. Estimated viewing distance was 30-75 yards for the first-year birds and 80-100 yards for the adult bird. I used a Bushnell 20-45x spotting scope.

Previous experience with species: I have seen several Thayer's Gulls in Iowa this fall.

References consulted: NGS Field Guide to the Birds of North America

How long before field notes were made? immediately

How long before this form was completed? 3 days